

VZCZCXRO9179  
RR RUEHLMC  
DE RUEHNM #0367/01 1401434  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 201434Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY  
TO RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0514  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5049  
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0840  
RUEHLMC/MCC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000367

AIDAC  
SIPDIS

ACCRA FOR USAID/WA - HEALTH/POPULATION OFFICER  
DEPT PLEASE PASS TO PRM/POP AND USAID/AFR (POPULATION)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [KWMN](#) [NG](#)

SUBJECT: NIGER: MINISTRY OF POPULATION AND SOCIAL REFORM  
OFFICIALS DISCUSS PLAN OF ACTION FOR FAMILY PLANNING WITH  
AMBASSADOR

¶1. Summary. On May 12, 2009, at the request of Government of Niger (GON) Minister of Population and Social Reform (MP/SR) Boukari Zila Mamadou, Ambassador Allen met with MP/SR officials to discuss the GON's family planning action plan. The officials asked for United States Government (USG) support of its plan via the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Ambassador stated she would inform the relevant party at the USAID Mission in Accra about the meeting as the health portfolio is managed as a regional responsibility at the USAID Mission/Accra. MP/SR has been meeting individually with ambassadors and United Nations System senior representatives accredited to Niger. Minister Boukari plans to host, at a date to be determined, a roundtable on Niger's family planning action plan. End summary.

¶2. MP/SR officials provided an overview of the Ministry's family planning work since implementation of the 2007 plan of action. They emphasized that the Ministry's efforts have been conducted in collaboration with primarily four other GON ministries (Health, Education, Women's Empowerment and Children's Protection, and Justice), as well as with traditional chiefs and local leaders. Numerous statistics on Niger were provided, notably Niger's annual population growth rate of 3.3 percent, the low rate of contraceptive use (reported as 5 percent) nationwide, the high pregnancy rate for girls age 15-19 (reported as 199 per 1000), a youth bulge with 66% of the population below age 25, the high rate of early marriage for girls before age 15 (reported as one out of 2 girls), all contributing not only to widespread poverty, but also to a high mortality rate for women during child birth and severe health consequences for women and girls (e.g. fistula).

¶3. MP/SR officials stated that the GON has set goals through year 2015 to help couples control family size and, as a result, improve quality of life for families. Among the goals:

- a) increase contraceptive use each year through 2015
- b) raise at 15 to 20 percent the number of couples that practice spacing between births
- c) promote maternal breastfeeding for longer periods
- d) reduce the number of births per woman from 7 births to 5 births
- e) reduce by one third (1/3) the number of early marriages
- f) reduce the population growth rate from 3.3 percent to 2.5 percent
- g) promote girls' education.

¶4. MP/SR officials noted that the Ministry solicits the support of local, religious and traditional leaders to help sensitize the local population about the benefits of family

planning. They highlighted the limited access to family planning services, information and facilities, especially in rural areas. They stressed the need for more income-generating activities to empower women, as many women may want contraceptives, but have no means to purchase them.

¶15. MP/SR officials emphasized that the Ministry of Justice needs to codify the rights of women and children. They suggested that donor partners' technical assistance is needed to implement the GON action plan, noting robust engagement by USAID from 1992-1998. They regretted technical support from USAID has been lacking since the USAID Mission closed in 1998 following the coup d'etat. They expressed interest in obtaining more technical support from USAID and hope for USAID participation in a roundtable the Ministry expects to host (date to be determined) to discuss demographics and family planning.

¶16. Ambassador thanked the MP/SR officials for the demographics overview and emphasized the need for the GON message on family planning to be coherent and consistent. She remarked that while MP/SR officials promote the importance of family planning, the GON's most's senior official recently made remarks at a groundbreaking ceremony to the effect that Niger has plenty of land area to accommodate a growing population. She said it's not helpful to have the person at the helm speaking counter to the efforts of MP/SR officials and donor partners.

¶17. Ambassador suggested that it may be useful for the Ministry to work with local media, especially television and radio, to sensitize the population about the benefits of

NIAMEY 00000367 002 OF 002

family planning. She cited as effective a recent media campaign (Note: USG funded) conducted in local languages by a local NGO to combat trafficking in persons (TIP). She echoed the MP/SR officials' concerns about the limited availability of family planning resources, particularly in rural areas. She commended the MP/SR push for the Ministry of Justice to strengthen legal instruments to protect women and children, such as codifying their rights.

¶18. Ambassador closed by stating that USAID is not structured the way it was in past decades, that there is a smaller number of missions and that larger missions, such as the one in Accra, have regional responsibilities covering a dozen or more countries. She remarked that much of the field work is implemented by nongovernmental organization partners with oversight from USAID. She added that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have stated the USG's intent to increase the number of USAID personnel, but said she did not know whether that would lead to the provision of a health officer in Niger.

¶19. MP/SR officials liked the idea of a media campaign, said they had actually discussed such a possibility within the Ministry, having taken note of the TIP campaign. They reminded Ambassador about the February 2008 national forum on demographics and reproductive health, attended by GON officials, religious leaders, civil society groups and women's organizations. They reported that a committee was formed to track several recommendations, such as the one calling for the Ministry of Justice to codify the rights of women and children, and expressed dismay at the slow progress on a number of recommendations. The MP/SR officials provided the Ambassador a copy of the national forum general report together with the 2007 family planning action plan. The Ambassador stated she would make known to USAID officials the Ministry's desire for technical support in the family planning area. She asked that MP/SR communicate to the Embassy as early as possible the roundtable date and related information, to ensure sufficient time for the Embassy to inform USAID/Accra.

ALLEN